

**Pressing On**  
***Philippians 3:12-16***

Good morning.

The Apostle Paul said in ***1 Corinthians 15:10, by the grace of God I am what I am. NKJV***

John Newton was a captain of different slave ships and he also invested heavily in slave trading.

Some years after his conversion to Christ, Newton renounced the slave trade and actually began working to end slavery.

John Newton was later ordained in the Church of England and served as a Parish priest.

John Newton said, “*I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world...*

*...but still, I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.”*

In the ***Book of Philippians***, Paul encourages his readers with an invitation and challenge to grow and keep growing as long as we are here on planet Earth.

So, we like John Newton, can say, “*I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.”*

Please open your Bibles to ***Philippians 3***, as we continue in our verse-by-verse study of Paul’s Epistle to the Church at Philippi.

Last week, Paul taught his readers to abandon the idea of self-righteousness as he explained a Christian's position in Christ.

Paul showed the difference between living and trusting in self-righteousness and living and trusting in God's righteousness, given to a person by faith in Christ.

Paul wrote the church and told them that the only way he could be found *in Christ* was by renouncing his **self-righteousness**.

Paul mentioned *faith*. Faith means to take God at His Word. Faith is weighing the evidence of what God has said and **believing** Him!

Paul said he renounced self-righteousness as dung was so he may **know** Christ. To know Jesus doesn't mean to know about Him, it means to have a relationship with Jesus through faith.

*Can you stand before a perfect God and claim that you are morally right or that your actions are justifiable?*

Whether I die or if the rapture happens, my prayer for you and me is the same as what Paul said in *verse 9*.

***Philippians 3:9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, NKJV***

*“What are you into?” “What are you passionate about? What moves you? At the end of this life, it will only matter who you know to determine where you will go!*

In the section of scripture we will look at today, Paul uses a race metaphor.

## I. Paul was perfectly imperfect.

Read *Philippians 3:12*

Last week we said that there is a positional and a **practical** truth to the command to live righteously before the Lord.

The **positional** aspect of Christ's *righteousness* is found in...

*2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. NKJV*

For the Christ follower, the moment we place our faith in Jesus Christ, our sins are instantly removed, and His righteousness is **imputed** to us.

Jac J. Muller said, *“Just as a little child is a perfect human being, but still is far from perfect in all his development as man, “So, the true child of God is also perfect in all parts, although not yet perfect in all the stages of his development in faith.”*

Here in this verse, Paul seems to indicate that he was not perfect as he wrote this letter. Again, if we remember Paul's pedigree and his resume, this was a big revelation.

*Perfected* in this context means mature. Paul was mature but he was not done maturing in Christ.

Warren Wiersbe said, “*One mark of this maturity is the knowledge that he is not perfect! The mature Christian honestly evaluates himself and strives to do better.*”

By this time, Paul had already been serving the Lord for nearly 30 years, many would probably believe he was mature enough to overcome temptations and spiritual battles at this point.

Paul was deeply satisfied with Christ; however, he was not content with his own achievements.

With the words, “*Not that I have already attained, or am **already perfected***”, Paul made it clear that he was not **satisfied** with the spiritual things he had already achieved for Christ.

Paul believed there was so much more to do for the kingdom.

There is not only a danger in living focused on our past mistakes, but there is also a danger when we rest on our past achievements as well.

Sometimes we hear about people who have been Christians for a long time, who start to believe that they have arrived or attained. Those sorts of people can become haughty and unteachable.

Some Christians compare themselves with other Christians, so they feel as if they have attained but we are supposed to look to Jesus as our **example** to follow, not other Christians.

As a Christian, you are *perfected* in Christ, but you are also being perfected daily until you go home to be with Jesus.

Notice Paul says so, ***I press on to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of me.***

Paul said no matter what, I will not turn back from following Christ!

When Spain was the world power (15th century), their coins were inscribed with the words, ***Ne Plus Ultra*** meaning “Nothing Further”, showing Spain as the ultimate power in the world.

After the discovery of the New World, Spain realized that it was not the end of the world, so they changed the inscription on their coins to read, ***Plus Ultra***, meaning “More Beyond.”

This is how some Christians are. Some Christians say there is “***Nothing Further***” to do for the kingdom and other Christians say there is “***More Beyond***” meaning still more to accomplish.

Notice Paul said, “***That I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.***”

Our salvation begins with Jesus laying hold of us.

***John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. NKJV***

David Guzik said, “So one should ask, “*Why did Jesus lay hold of Paul?*”

*Jesus laid hold of Paul to make him a new man so Paul would lay hold of that and wanted to see the converting work of Jesus completely carried out in himself.*

*“Jesus laid hold of Paul to make him an **instrument** in the conversion of others so Paul would lay hold of the work of bringing others to Jesus.” (David Guzik)*

Even though Paul was saved, he still wanted to lay hold of Jesus with the same amount of zeal that Jesus used to lay hold of Paul.

## **II. Forget the past and serve the Lord.**

Read *Philippians 3:13-14*

The word *apprehended* means to seize or arrest something either physically or mentally.

Again, Paul said that he did not believe he had arrived as a Christian, so he then gave some advice on how we can be victorious while serving the Lord.

The word *forgetting* means “*dismissing from the mind or paying no attention.*” To “*forget*” means to stop dwelling on something.

As Christ-followers, we should forget anything that will hinder us from pressing on possessing all that Christ has for us.

We should also forget anything in the past that might rob our present pursuit of Christ, anything that will rob us of peace in Christ, or anything that contradicts what the Lord says about us.

This even includes past victories as well.

Richard Cimino said, “*Yesterday’s battles were won with yesterday’s grace. We can rejoice over them, but we can’t **rest** in them. God is willing to give you grace for today.*” (Cimino)

Satan is called the *father of lies* of he is also called the *accuser of the brethren*.

***Revelation 12:10 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God, day and night, has been cast down. NKJV***

Sin does have consequences; however, once we have repented of the sin, we should then rearview-mirror our past losses and not allow Satan to continue to **remind** us of our past failures.

Sandy Adams said about Satan, “*He’s an astute historian. His goal is to make us remember the things we ought to forget, and to forget the things we ought to remember.*”

If Paul had let his past sin consume his life, he would have never been able to plant so many churches, share the Gospel, or write letters to the churches that became part of the New Testament.

Paul simply remembered his past through the view of God’s grace and mercy.

Many times, Paul used analogies of a race within his writings, and here in this letter to the Church at Philippi, as well as his letter to Corinth, he used the analogy of a runner.

***1 Corinthians 9:25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.***

***1 Corinthians 9:26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.***

***1 Corinthians 9:27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. NKJV***

In order for someone to win a race, a runner needs to ignore distractions including any mistakes they may have made along the way.

When Paul said, “***Forgetting those things which are behind***”, he was saying, “*Don’t look back or dwell on the past.*”

As Christians, we need to stop dwelling on the past. Don’t let anything behind you interfere with your present progress or future work for the Gospel.

Personal growth as a Christian should be one of our greatest priorities. Not that we have arrived, but we ***press on*** maturing and growing in Christ until we go home to be with Jesus.

Notice Paul said, “***The prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.***”

F.B. Meyer, “*It is a high calling because it comes from above, from God; the conception of it has emanated from His heart.*

*It is a high calling because it is worthy of God.*

*It is a high calling because it is so much above the ideals of men...*



*And then this is a high calling because it summons us to where Christ sits at the right hand of God.”*

The **prize** is more than eternal life and its blessings. The **call** of God is part of the **prize**. The fact that a holy God would call us and bless us to be a part of His plan, is an **extraordinary** prize!

Adam Clarke said about “**reaching forward**”, “*The Greek word points out the strong exertions made in the race; every muscle and nerve is exerted, and he puts forth every particle of his strength in running.*

*“Paul was running for life and running for his life.” (Clarke)*

We should be aware of where our focus is because if we are so preoccupied with different things down here on Earth, we cannot focus on the **upward call of Christ**.

### **III. Walk in maturity.**

Read ***Philippians 3:15-16***

I am the youngest of six siblings and I remember while growing up, I always wanted to be older.

My oldest brother is 13 years older than I am, so the idea of doing the same things he was able to do wasn't realistic at all.

I wanted to imitate and act like my siblings, dress like them, and be able to do all the things they did.

As life went on, there was always an age I wanted to get to, to be able to do something I wasn't able to do in the past.

- I wanted to stay up past eight o'clock at night.
- I couldn't wait to be able to walk to school alone.
- I wanted to ride the big kids' rides at Disney Land.
- Soon I wanted to be 16 so I could drive a car
- Then I wanted to be 18 and done with High school

And the list goes on and on.

David Guzik said, *“The problems of unity facing the Philippians did not spring from great problems with carnality as was the case with the Corinthians.*

*Rather it seemed to be a danger brought on by pressure, both from the outside and from the inside. Paul wanted to make sure this pressure pushed them together instead of driving them apart*

Notice Paul said, ***“Therefore, let us as many as are mature, have this mind.”***

Those who are mature will have the same mind as other mature Christians and if they do not, Paul said the Lord would reveal the **necessity** of becoming like-minded.

Paul trusted the Lord to deal with His people, he didn't believe he had to be the end all to convince people to be mature in Christ.

Let's talk about some steps to spiritual maturity.

1. Christian growth and maturity begin with a **desire** to grow, placed within us through the Holy Spirit.

If you are indeed born again, the Holy Spirit lives within you and since it is God's desire for you to Grow up and mature in the Grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, He will lead you.

***John 16:13 When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. NKJV***

A desire to grow comes naturally to those who belong to the Lord.

## 2. Christian growth and maturity need **nourishment**.

The Lord Himself places this hunger within us to grow...

***Matthew 5:6 Blessed (oh how happy) are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. NKJV***

Hunger and thirst are natural expressions of the basic human desire and the need for food and water. These desires can also be described as a passion or strong desire within our lives.

Most Christians have been fooled into believing that something from the world will fulfill the strong cravings within their lives.

King Solomon wrote *Ecclesiastes* to correct that thinking.

Solomon had everything you could imagine. He had wisdom, wealth, power, money, and 1000 women.

Solomon could not find happiness in a worldly life. His soul was never satisfied, and he said all these things were vain and futile.

Spiritually speaking, there is a hunger for God down in every heart that is often not recognized for what it is.

Some of us have an empty feeling, a sense of longing, and even loneliness, so we try to fill it with things of the world. Some look for fulfillment in many areas except with the Lord.

The Lord says we should hunger and thirst for things He can offer that will satisfy our deepest cravings.

- Fellowship with our Creator.
- A right standing with God that comes from Faith in Jesus.
- The promise of Eternal Life.

The Lord wants to give us His power, presence, and goodness until we are so full, that we can't contain what He is pouring into our lives so, it flows out of us.

We grow in that nourishment by getting to know the Lord more and more through Bible study, prayer, worship, and fellowship with like-minded Christ-followers.

### **3. Christian growth and maturity take time and patience.**

*James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,*

*James 1:3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.*

*James 1:4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. NKJV*

If you are like me, you want maturity and growth, but you want it immediately.

But true growth takes time and patience, walking with the Lord as He teaches lessons, we never realized we needed.

To learn to teach, we must teach over and over again. To learn to lead worship, someone has to practice songs at home, sing with their family, and lead at church meetings over and over.

To understand the Bible, someone should study it daily and discuss it with friends and family.

To learn to Pray, a person should do it over and over again.

Kids may not be good at activities at first, but as they practice and parents encourage them to do it over and over, they get better.

Likewise, older members encourage the newer ones to use their talents. They may not be skilled at first, but they learn by doing.

New believers will make many mistakes, but fear not some of the greatest people in the Bible made big mistakes, as well.

- Moses made excuses when God called him to lead Israel.
- David committed adultery with Bathsheba but was then called a man after God's own heart.
- Peter denied Jesus three times.
- Paul persecuted Christians before his conversion.
- Thomas doubted Jesus' resurrection.

- All the apostles forsook Jesus when He was arrested and crucified.

But all of these are remembered as some of the greatest servants.

Great servants of God are not people who live without ever sinning, but people who learn from their mistakes and *press on* to serve the Lord **faithfully**.

#### **IV. Practical Application.**

John Newton was a captain of different slave ships and he also invested heavily in slave trading.

Some years after his conversion to Christ, Newton renounced the slave trade and began working to end slavery.

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*...but still, I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.”*

When we grow in Christ, we will automatically change.

Growth is at the very center of our Christian lives. In Christianity, you are either moving forward or you are backsliding. There is **no neutral** in Christianity.

No one is too old to grow in Christ. It is the Lord’s desire for us to continue to grow until He takes us home to heaven.

***2 Peter 3:17 You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked;***

***2 Peter 3:18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. NKJV***

We must be alert and resist things that grow into our lives through pride and sin because those things go against the work of Christ within us.

When my children were born, I wanted them to grow in every way, even so, God, wants His Children to grow up.

***Ephesians 4:14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,***

***Ephesians 4:15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ. NKJV***

*Christian, are you growing in wisdom, education, our relationship with Christ, our relationship with other Christians, and in the ministry of the Gospel?*

**Pressing on means we don't give up!** When we realize how loved we are and how much Christ has done, we will ***press on***.

***And forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.***